International Social Science Review

Volume 97 | Issue 4 Article 12

Book Review: The Whites are the Enemies of Heaven by Mark W. Driscoll

Barbara Greene

Driscoll, Mark W. *The Whites are the Enemies of Heaven*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. i-367. Paperback, $29.95.

Mark W. Driscoll's *The Whites are the Enemies of Heaven* is a fascinating exploration of the exploitative ideologies of nineteenth century European imperialism in both central China and Japan. Driscoll is known for his previous work, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*, which explored the populations rendered powerless and invisible under Japanese expansionism through the lens of critical theory and subaltern studies. Unsurprisingly, Driscoll has continued his examination of the inequities and exploitations of nineteenth century imperialist ideologies with this text, albeit now with a focus on the racial and economic justifications given by ninettenth century Euro-American imperialists for their actions in East Asia and the ways in which imperialism was resisted by groups in China and Japan.

This work primarily focuses on the ways that the white supremacist ideology that underpinned much of nineteenth century European and American imperialism. The ideology of imperialism not only created systems of economic exploitation and social precarity within the regions that were targeted by major imperialist powers but also created the foundations for the political and economic structures that would eventually precipitate anthropogenic climate change. Driscoll, utilizing a number of novel sources in a variety of languages, is able to demonstrate a strong contrast in the perception among the local populations and members of the imperialist diaspora communities concerning the ways that the natural environment and resources should be exploited that supports his case well.

In one instance highlighted in the text, Driscoll notes that Eling mountain near Chongqing had a number of limitations placed on the quarrying of rock from the site due to beliefs in *feng shui*. When members of the local community began to dig deeper

into the mountainside, the resulting conflict concerning the use of natural resources of Eling Mountain was resolved through legally arbitrated negotiations between various local interests who came to a mutually beneficial agreement. Therefore, the environmental and spiritual damage inflicted on the local community was limited by social and religious pressure. However, once Chongqing was forcibly opened to foreign trade, this area was promptly claimed by an American Methodist missionary group that placed their mission at the peak of this mountain. This eventually resulted in an attack against the mission by the aggrieved and offended local population during the Dragon Boat festivities in 1886 that ended in two members of the missionary group being held hostage for a week.

Driscoll uses cases such as this to explore a particular outgrowth of nineteenth century imperialism that he calls "Climate Caucasianism." This neologism describes the exploitation of both human and natural resources as a form of almost nihilistic capitalism that ignores the long-term ramifications of this behavior on both society and the environment. This practice led inexplicably to the diminishment and degradation of all involved. Driscoll posits that the remnants of Climate Caucasianism that linger in contemporary economic and social policies is a prime factor behind anthropogenic climate change.

While Eling Mountain is an example of this phenomenon in regards to the environment there are also repercussions of this on the human-level as well. In his discussions on late-Tokugawa and early Meiji era Japan, Driscoll notes how this particular worldview led to the sexual exploitation of Japanese girls and young women by American and European men. Beginning with a discussion of the French autobiographical novel *Madame Chrysantheme*, Driscoll explores the way race and

gender were erotized to the point where women—and often young girls—were transformed into a form of commodity. Driscoll creates another neologism to describe the exploitation of humans as a form of commodity for capitalistic exploitation: *rawfared*.

It is in this heavy creation of neologisms in this work where Driscoll's otherwise tightly argued and well-researched work falters slightly. It can be incongruous for the reader to encounter sometimes seemingly jokey terminology in discussions concerning the suffering of sexually exploited adolescent girls or the forcible expansion of the opium trade. For example, the term *supinestupefiedyellows* is used to describe the semiotic networks of concepts and imagery that were used to justify Euro-American exploitation of the Sichuan or Japanese populations. In turn, the white male imperialist population who dominated merchant and diplomatic corps is called *Speed Race(r)* for their speedy infiltration and extraction of commodities and human potential from targeted regions. While not derailing the work in a significant way, this choice in terminology may be off-putting for some readers.

Lastly, in addition to the interesting concept of Climate Caucasianism, Driscoll has also taken an intriguing perspective on local resistance groups in both Japan and Chongqing. By exploring the ways in which these groups represented not only class and social differences among the local population, but also the ways in which imperialism could either be resisted or collaborated with, Driscoll has added a deeper layer to his discussion of imperialist exploitation that reveals in greater detail the nuances of subaltern response. In Chongqing, Driscoll explores the resistance mounted by the *Gelaohui* and the ways in which local authorities and members of higher social classes attempted to suppress this group despite mutual distaste for Euro-American

imperialism. Furthermore, Driscoll shows the ways that the trade in opium was hijacked by the population of Sichuan and Chongqing for their own economic and social benefit. However, perhaps the most interesting analysis is Driscoll's work on *Genyosha*, which runs counter to many of the prevailing perceptions of the group in contemporary historical discourse. This work would be an excellent addition to reading lists for graduate students who are studying Postcolonialism and subaltern studies.

Barbara Greene
Associate Professor
Tokyo International University